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LIBYA AIR FORCE PILOTS

RECRUITED IN LONDON OFFICE

AMERICAN investigators, working closely with Scotland Yard, have established that British, American and Canadian pilots and aircraft mechanics are being recruited as mercenaries for the Libyan Air Force through an office in Knox Street, Marylebone.

The mercenaries, who are paid through the London office in a scheme organised by a former American CIA agent, Mr Edwin P. Wilson, who is now a fugitive in Tripoli, also include former British paratroopers.

Some of the pilots recruited to Libya reportedly flew American-built Ch-47 Chinook helicopters in support of the Libyan invasion of Chad this year.

Others have been flying and maintaining the fleet of C-130 Hercules transport aircraft which the regime of Col Gaddafi acquired from the United States before relations between Tripoli and Washington turned sour.

Mr. Wilson, who American investigators say used his CIA background to establish a multi-million-dollar international arms and specialist-training operation for several radical third-world governments, is wanted in the United States on a 1980 federal indictment charging him with illegally shipping explosives to Libya to help train terrorists.

He is believed to have made at least two clandestine trips to London since he fled the United States and established his base in Tripoli, close to his major client, Col Gaddafi. He has also been accused of

recruiting former CIA agents and members of the Green Berets, the American special forces, to train Libyans in guerrilla warfare and terrorist operations.

In addition to their activities, there have also been allegations of involvement in a scheme to sell secret American computer technology to Russia.

Two companies established by Wilson to handle the recruitment through London of specialists needed by the Libyan armed forces were identified by the New York Times yesterday as OSI, SA and Western Recruitment Inc.

The first is a Swiss corporation. The registered address for the second is a Swiss post office box number.

According to the New York Times report, the affairs of both companies have been handled for some time by a London company, Brillhurst, which has offices in a nondescript, three-storey building in Knox Street.

The paper quoted Mrs Diana Byrne, the British woman in

she met Wilson in Libya several years ago. She described Brillhurst as a "service company" which represents several European companies, many of which operate in Libya.

Paying office

The New York Times, which has been monitoring the comings and goings at Knox Street, said that Mrs Byrne "terminated the conversation" when asked specifically about her work on behalf of Wilson and his companies.

The report added that several London businessmen and travel agents who had worked with Brillhurst and Mrs Byrne said that the London company had been responsible for paying travel expenses and salaries to pilots working in Libya, obtaining Libyan visas for those doing business with Wilson, managing his investments and handling his mail, telephone and telex messages.

It said that in the past three years, Brillhurst had operated out of four separate London locations, "often moving abruptly and functioning in a secretive fashion."

The landlord who rented space to Brillhurst until December last year said that the company's staff conducted business in coded telex messages and removed ribbons from typewriters before leaving the office.

Two former landlords were quoted as saying they often saw "Western pilots who had just arrived in London" waiting at Brillhurst offices for Libyan visas or flights to Libya.

Experience lacking

The presence of Western pilots and mechanics in Libya has helped to explain how Col. Gaddafi's air force has been operating the American equipment it acquired in the 1970s.

There has been speculation that Russian, North Korean, Pakistani and Palestinian pilots have been flying other Libyan military aircraft.

Only a small number of Libyans are said to have the experience to handle and maintain the military aircraft and helicopters and transport planes operating over Libya, Chad and the Mediterranean.

The Libyan air force last summer lost two of its Russian-supplied fighters in a dogfight over the Gulf of Sidra against two American fighters from the aircraft carrier Nimitz.

The Western mercenaries in Libya presumably would have played no role in that incident since only Russian equipment and Russian-trained pilots were involved.

But with relations between Washington and Tripoli deteriorating alarmingly, the possibility arises that American military power might one day be directed against Libyan aircraft flown and maintained by well-paid Westerners who have passed through the recruiting office in Knox Street.